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BRUNO SCHLUMBERGER, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Gordon Jenkins, the president of NATO Veterans Association of Canada, is among a group of veterans who have been invited to attend a wreath-laying ceremony at the War Memorial Thursday with William and Kate.

Another meeting with royals 60 years after the first

Gordon Jenkins among a group of Ottawa veterans invited to William and Kate's first official event

BY DON BUTLER

When Gordon Jenkins was 11, he had a close encounter with the current Queen, then still a princess, and her husband, Philip, during their inaugural tour of Canada in 1951.

The royal couple had journeyed by boat down the Rideau Canal to Lansdowne Park, where they were met by a group of schoolchildren, young Gordon among them.

"It was so nice because we could get so close," says Jenkins, who estimates he got within 10 feet of the visiting royals.

Jenkins can still recall the tender way Philip looked after Elizabeth, and the obvious love between them. "You could feel it," he says.

Flash forward six decades.

Jenkins, now president of the NATO Veterans Organization of Canada, will get a chance Thursday to connect with another celebrated

royal couple — Elizabeth's grandson, William, and his new wife, Kate.

Jenkins, who did three peacekeeping tours in the Middle East during a 17-year career in the Canadian forces, is among a group of Ottawa-area veterans invited to the couple's first official event.

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WATCH a video of Gordon Jenkins talking about the Queen's 1951 visit, at

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Veterans: Surprising ties to royals revealed

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He and his fellow veterans have been told they'll have a chance to speak to the royal visitors at wreath-laying at the National War Memorial's Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. But he's not the pushy sort. "You wait till you're spoken to," he says firmly. "I guess that's old school."

He's taking the event in stride. "I'm kind of an old puppy to get excited about things nowadays. They're just people. I guess, after a while, you don't start screaming and waving your flag like I did when I was an 11-year-old."

Jenkins isn't the only veteran with royal connections who'll meet the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge during their three-day visit to Ottawa. Interviews with several revealed some surprising links to the Royal Family.

Take 90-year-old Fred Hicks, for instance. He joined the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa in 1937 and fought in Europe as an infantry machine-gunner during the Second World War, landing on Juno Beach the day after D-Day.

When King George VI and his wife, Elizabeth (later the Queen Mother), made their historic tour of Canada in 1939, he paraded for them with fellow Cameron Highlanders. Then in 1989, he was presented to the Queen mum in the East Block of Parliament when she returned for a 50th anniversary visit.

"She wanted to know if there was someone still there from '39, and of course I was the one, so I was presented to her," says Hicks, who still drives and lives in an apartment on Richmond Road.

Hicks also attended the Queen's coronation in 1953 as a representative of the Camerons, and has the coronation medal — presented in the courtyard of Buckingham Palace, no less — to prove it.

Hicks, too, will be at Thursday's wreath-laying ceremony. How does

he regard the prospect of meeting William and Kate? "Well," he allows with a delighted cackle, "that's going to be something!"

Roger Beauregard has a pretty decent royals story, too. The 77-year-old veteran of the Korean War has an MBE — that's Member of the Order of the British Empire for the uninitiated — given to him personally by the Queen at Buckingham Palace in 1963 for his peacekeeping service in the Congo.

Beauregard, who will meet William and Kate at a reception at the Canadian War Museum on Saturday, downplays the honour. Why, he jokes, even the Beatles got one.

But he allows as how meeting the Queen was memorable. "The first thing she asked me was, 'What are you doing here?'" he recalls. "For a moment, I almost panicked. I felt like saying, 'Well, I was invited.'" It turned out the Queen just wanted to know why he was in Europe. "So I told her I was serving with the NATO forces."

Wayne MacCulloch, who heads

the Ottawa chapter of the Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping, will also attend Thursday's ceremony at the War Memorial. His grandfather was one of three Canadair employees in Montreal who met Princess Elizabeth during that long-ago 1951 tour. He still has a photograph.

Five of MacCulloch's members will attend the War Museum reception. Most are "in awe" of the honour, he says. "One doesn't feel that things like this are actually going to happen. because we're pretty much just ordinary Canadians. I think it will be just a pure joy."

Len Pelletier, who spent 28 years in the Canadian Forces, has no royal stories to tell yet, though that will change after he meets William and Kate at the War Memorial. But he does have one audacious idea.

"I don't know how this would go off," he begins, "but if I ever got to talk to William, I'd invite him to my place for supper." Pelletier, 64, owns a bungalow on an acre lot in Buckingham. "I would tell him my house

is not a palace, but it's a nice place, clean, food is good."

The way Pelletier sees it, he and William would hang together in the house while his wife whips up the sort of meal — perhaps steak — that he and his family enjoy. "We could sit there and talk and watch the news," he says.

The odds aren't good, Pelletier admits. But he likes William. "He just seems like an ordinary person, a great guy, someone that you'd like to be friendly with."

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